

SPEAK UP

Here's how these Meridian residents answered the question, "If you could say one thing to a Guardsman, Reservist or member of the active-duty military serving overseas, what would it be?"

"Keep up the good work and come home safe."
Shea Smith, 14
student

"Thank you for all you're doing for us, and I'm praying for your safe return home."
Jessica Rutledge, 17
student

"Special thanks to all the servicemen. We especially appreciate your sacrifice when we're enjoying freedoms, and you're fighting to preserve those freedoms."
David Little, 55
school superintendent

"Take cheer in doing good deeds. We are praying for you and your happy return home to your families."
Ross Wingo, 57
U.S. Army, retired

"I wish you could come home."
Jeanne Havard, 48
teacher

"We are praying for you, stay positive, and be faithful. We are hoping you come home soon."
Courtney Sullivan, 21
bank teller

Erin Johnson compiled this Speak Up question. She is a sophomore at Southeast Lauderdale High School — and enjoys shopping, cheering, watching reality TV and going places with friends. Erin attends Hebron Baptist Church and plans to pursue a career in the medical field.



Johnson

Marilyn M. Scott is a lifelong resident of Meridian. She's been married to C.A. "Buddy" Scott for nearly 25 years. They attend Lauderdale Methodist Church. The couple has three children, Jennifer, Michelle and Heather, and six grandchildren — Mary Kate, Trevor, Richie, Jack and twins, Ansley and Madison. The tag on the front of Marilyn's Tahoe says it all ... "If we had known grandchildren were so much fun, we would have had them first!" Marilyn wrote this story in November, after George W. Bush was re-elected president of the United States of America.

By Marilyn Scott
special to The Star

These weeks after the election have been very introspective for me. It was a great relief to have this president back in office. I feel that, finally, we have a president who is truly a man who would make the founders of this country proud. These founders said we needed to be governed with prayer and honesty. He knew he need not campaign very heavily in the Deep South — the Bible Belt, redneck headquarters. He knew the values and morality we have here would prevail. And it did, as in record numbers the Christians of this country finally said, "Enough!" The echo of that majority vote is still being heard across the country. If you keep up with politics, you may know President Bush garnered the largest number of votes ever — even though

Proud to be a redneck

... All those rednecks went to the polls and said "Don't Mess with the Prez from Texas — and don't mess with his Bible-thumping, church-going, God-believing rednecks!"

some in the media attempted to make light of it.

So now what? Finally, we can be assured that U.S. Supreme Court justices selected will have good moral and family values. We can also be assured that the things we hold dear in this country can continue for at least four more years.

That, in itself, is a huge relief.

Perhaps, we'll have four more years of ...

Having a Christian as president will mean a lot in the coming years. Perhaps we will not have to argue the point with the liberal left about taking God out of everything we say, do and feel — or off our money.

Perhaps we will have four more years to go to the church we choose without having to worry that some pastor somewhere will have his church removed from the IRS rolls as a tax-free entity because he spoke out against those in power from the pulpit.

Perhaps we will have four more years of a president who believes with all his heart that children are a precious commodity, not to be killed as they are being born.

Perhaps we will have four more years of hearing a president praying for this country and praying about his decisions

for this country. In case some of you may not know, the president has a Presidential Prayer Team which receives prayer requests by e-mail telling us what the president needs us to be praying for that particular day or week.

Perhaps the country will finally learn that there is absolutely no place in the U.S. Constitution that says anything about separation of church and state.

Doing the right thing

Mr. Bush knew Iraq was going to make him a target in this election. We all knew that!

But he still was not careless about it. He did not attempt to remove our soldiers just to win the election. Mr. Bush stood his ground and said, no matter what, he was going to do what is right for this country and for Iraq.

It would have been so easy to just pull troops out and have a better line for the election process. He knew he had to do the right thing, even if it did cost him the election. He never

stood down. He never quavered. He never let the Dan Rathers of this world get the best of him.

Instead, he stood tall and let the record speak for itself. The only one leaving in disgrace was Rather.

Not long ago I received an e-mail about "rednecks." It was a take-off on all the redneck jokes Jeff Foxworthy has left us laughing with for many years.

Call us what you like

When the election was going through its process, we heard many people talk about the conservative rednecks.

I think that got some folks riled up! Because all those rednecks went to the polls and said "Don't Mess with the Prez from Texas — and don't mess with his Bible-thumping, church-going, God-believing rednecks!"

We have enjoyed redneck jokes for years. It's time to take a reflective look at the core beliefs of a culture that values home, family, country and God.

If I had to stand before a dozen terrorists who were threatening my life, I'd choose a half-dozen or so rednecks to back me up. Tire irons, squirrel guns and grit — that's what rednecks are made of."

I have a confession to make: I am a bona fide redneck!

When war visits your generation

Angela Gamber, 29, lives in Collinsville and works at Daniels Roofing in Meridian. She is married to Shawn Gamber and they have one daughter, Madison. They attend Pine Grove Church.

By Angela Gamber
special to The Star

Every generation has its own war stories. If you are my age, you have a granddaddy, great uncle or other male relative who served in the Korean War. You also probably have a father or uncle that served in the Vietnam War.

Their stories never seem to hit home until they happen in your own generation ...

I learned about the military from people in my family who served in the Korean War or the Vietnam War, but in March 2002, my views changed. I married a wonderful man named Shawn Gamber. Everything I knew about the military flew out the window when I met him and his family.

His dad, John, is a 20-year Navy veteran. His mom, Becky, served in the Navy for several years. Shawn served in the Navy during the Bosnian Conflict and is a 10-year veteran. His brothers Bryan and Gary are Marines and his brother Kevin is in the Air Force.

This is where the stories and deployments really start to hit home. I had always admired military personnel and their families, but it is different when you are a part of one.

War stories

The reality of how war works came to life in February 2003. My brother-in-law Gary received orders to go to Iraq. At the same time, my brother-in-law Bryan

I think everyone in our generation has the mindset that we are bulletproof and invincible. We think nothing bad can ever really happen. When you have someone in your family telling stories of people right beside him or her being killed and shot at, you stop thinking of yourself as quite so immortal.

was deployed to the Persian Gulf and later to the Liberian Coast.

The stories Gary told when he came home seemed to come to life more than any I had ever heard before. I think everyone in our generation has the mindset that we are bulletproof and invincible. We think nothing bad can ever really happen.

When you have someone in your family telling stories of people right beside him or her being killed and shot at, you stop thinking of yourself as quite so immortal.

Then, as you are watching the news and hear about people like Chris Mabry, Josh Ladd and Matt Stovall and all the others who made the ultimate sacrifice, it becomes crystal clear ...

As I was writing this, we found out that my cousin, Stephen Stringfellow, will be leaving for Iraq. He is in the Mississippi Air National Guard. He joined the Guard after the war began. There are

many people who do this sort of thing, who are willing to fight even when there is a war going on.

It is easy to sign up when things are quiet with just the thought of war in the back of your mind, but when we are in the midst of war, it takes a lot of prayerful thought to join ... It is scary, but reassuring, that we have brave men and women on the front lines defending this wonderful country we call home.

Take time to say thanks

The military has always meant a lot to me. These men and women sign a dotted line that means they may have to lay down their lives. They take this risk for people who appreciate them — and also for those who just take advantage of their sacrifice.

When I say take advantage of, I mean, those that protest and talk bad about our military. These people are able to do these things because of our service men and women.

One of my favorite Bible verses is John 15:13: "Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends."

The next time you see a person in a military uniform, take the time to thank him or her. They spend time away from their families. They also don't know when they leave home whether they will come back or not. These service men and women consider you their friend, so they should be treated the same.

To all the men and women who have served or are serving in the military, I want to take this time to say thank you. My daughter will have a better life thanks to all you do.



ILLUSTRATION BY EMILLIO JONES

SAFE RETURN HOME

Northwest Junior High School art students were asked to draw pictures to salute U.S. troops. Here's what ninth-grader Emillio Jones said about his drawing: "This was one way I could show my appreciation to everyone serving in Iraq. This person could be your brother, father, neighbor or your friend. We wish you a safe return home."